

Pray.

What's the bone most often broken by heretics? The blasphemur.

What's the worst that could happen to an heretic cow? Being burned to the steak

What did the Pope say to the heretic who successfully lobbied to be buried on hallowed ground? "What we have here is a failure to excommunicate!"

What did the Romans say after they caught the heretic? Nailed it.

How many heretics does it take to change a lightbulb? We're not sure, they've yet to see the light.

Heresy is, I can tell you, alive and well. It's alive and well because heresy is a point of view that challenges current accepted thought, it's a pushing of boundaries, it's a reinterpretation what was thought to be true. Jesus and his disciples were all heretics, by the accepted truth of the Jewish teaching of their day. Jesus taught about and his disciples believed in a God who was very different from the rule-bound transcendent, scary God of deliverance that the Pharisees taught about and the Jews accepted as truth.

But Jesus was more than just a heretic, he was a blasphemer. It nearly got him killed on several occasions, and did get him crucified eventually. As we hear in Mark's Gospel the high priest heard Jesus answer claiming to be the Messiah and the Son of God, and tore his robes in distress and judgement, "You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?" All of them condemned Jesus as deserving death.' He went a step too far, a step from the heretical questioning, detail-pushing, reinterpretation of orthodoxy, a step beyond the sacrilegious stealing of God's honour, to publicly claiming equal status with God himself. In essence, for the culture and religion he was part of, Jesus made himself into an idol. In doing this he disputed the very nature of God by making himself equal to God and God equal to him, he blasphemed! In the eyes of Jewish faith, Jesus pulled God down. They could not begin to conceive that Jesus, who they knew as only human, could be both human and divine. They could not begin to conceive that God, Yahweh, would deign to reduce himself by becoming human. They could not begin to conceive that there could be one who is fully human and fully divine. Nowadays, to dispute the nature of Jesus would be heretical, it would be a rejection of the established belief of Christianity, a reinterpretation of the

Orthodox teachings we understand. Normally, heretical Christian thought wouldn't go so far as to question such a core belief as the nature of Jesus, although there are different views on how his divinity is made real. The dualism of Gnostic heresy is a key part of many named centuries old heresies. This is where either the humanity or divinity of Jesus is highlighted above and beyond the other, and the group can't hold in tension both parts of Jesus. It is hard, this is a concept that baffles most of us, probably all of us if we think about it, how can God be fully human, and how can a human person be fully God? There is a creed that we sometimes use called the Athanasian Creed that is based all around this issue and declares Jesus to be both fully human and fully God. It then kind of plays with that idea in words exploring how that works out. We can fall into this heresy of thought quite easily just because we find it hard to reconcile human and divine in one being. So we find ourselves thinking of Jesus as the human version of God or we make him an untouchable distant spiritual God. Immanent or transcendent, and how to hold the 2 in tension is not always easy. But mostly we find heresy in different ways of thinking about other issues less vital to our faith, so there are different understandings or interpretations on evolution, gay marriage, open or closed communion, infant baptism, women's ministry. These different interpretations are the reason for so many different denominations of Christianity. People disagree and many people can't agree to disagree and find enough common ground to stay together. You then get church division, sometimes painfully so.

In St Luke's, we could end up with multiple groups of people who interpret biblical writings in slightly different ways. I doubt anyone here today has a significant issue with women in leadership, given that I'm the vicar and I'm preaching and presiding at Communion today. But there are people in our church on both sides of the understanding of gay marriage, and what we should do if I'm asked to bless a gay couple following a civil marriage. There are also people who don't agree with infant baptism, which we do every month and is the settled practice of the Church of England. I'd be surprised if there weren't different understandings amongst us on evolution and creation, a closed or open communion table, demonic activity or human, possibly systemic, sin, ordination or the priesthood of all believers, and so much more. Any of us believing one possible interpretation can call others believing a different interpretation, Heretic. And naming someone a Heretic can be a powerful insult, worthy of a divided church. We may not use the word 'heretic', we may

instead use terms which are more contemporary and so seem less contentious, terms such as 'evangelical', 'progressive', 'liberal', 'charismatic'. Basically, we hear people talk and then label them as different to us in some way, as wrong because they don't understand the truth as I understand it. This has been going on for centuries and is the root cause of much of the violence done in the name of God. But it's worth remembering that if you have a label for someone then they will probably have one for you too. It takes a heretic to know a heretic, because someone I think it's heretical will inevitably think I'm heretical, because we hold different opinions about something. Questions, discussions, sharing the faith of others openly and with respect are the bedrock of the gospel and of faith. Some of us may have one simple understanding with no question in our mind about Jesus, and that's great and a blessing for you. But we're not all the same and some else's wrestling, questioning, changing is ok, in fact it's better than ok, it's great, it's the foundation of creation as it brings new thought into being. Heresy in the history of our church has led to pain and suffering, but it has also brought us to faith, to a settled faith in who Jesus is, who God the Father and Holy Spirit are. Without the questioning and wrestling of our forbears over the last 2 millennia we would not know who God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are, or have an inkling of what they are or how they relate. We need heresy, we need diversity of thought, we need questions, even when they challenge and discomfort us.

So, what do you do when you hear a different view point on some theological or biblical issue you believe deeply in? If you're talking to a wide variety of people in this church you will come across different views and they may be challenging and provocative and disturbing, so what do you do with that?

I think we need to learn to value what we hold as core to our faith, that is that Jesus is Lord, Jesus is God, Jesus loves you and me and Jesus calls us to love each other. Jesus is the only one allowed to judge another, we can disagree with another and choose to think differently, but we are not called to judge or condemn. We are called to love. That is not compromise, it is grace. Unity is not about conformity, it can be blessed by diversity of thought. A diversity of thought may make us uncomfortable, may challenge us, may lead to our disagreement, but even in the midst of such responses and emotions God calls us to gracious love. When I think about the cross and Jesus' crucifixion, I am amazed at his willingness to cover my sin with his sacrifice. We are called to be imitators of Jesus, so to cover what we see as others'

sin with our grace, even to the point of sacrificing our rightness to bear with their wrongness. I can hear the argument coming though, that that is just condoning sin, and we should confront sin with truth. We are called to pray, we are called to confront sin or challenge, we are not called to judge, condemn, destroy peace or bring disunity. We are called to love and sacrifice for others. IN the end, our response needs to be one of prayerful grace placing each other in God's hands and allowing the Holy Spirit to bring conviction where they will. Maybe God is actually ok with a diversity of understandings, maybe God is ok with us each being on a journey of growing in faith and wisdom and maybe it's just my and you that need the security of all thinking the same. If you feel provoked pray and wait on God and let the Holy Spirit speak to you, ask yourself and God why, come and talk to me or another minister or your small group, be a bringer of peace and an actor of grace, and a minister of reconciliation. Above all, love one another, as Jesus calls us to, even when you don't like or agree with the other. Love is a choice, more than a feeling, and can be made even when you dislike or disagree with someone. Let's choose to love and have good discussions about how we disagree, learning from each other and challenging with the truth as we see it graciously.

Pray.